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NSC BRIEFING 19 January 1955

CHINESE OFFSHORE ISLANDS

I. Chinese Communists are expected to follow their capture of Ichiang island (18 January) with further assaults on islands of Tachen group.

A. Smaller outlying islands of Tachens command--Yushan to northeast, Pishan and Nanchishan to southwest--are in immediate danger. These held by total of 2,500 regulars (all on Nanchishan) and 3,150 guerrillas.

B. Communist assaults on two principal islands of Tachen group--Upper Tachen and Lower Tachen, garrisoned by 10,000 regulars and 2,750 guerrillas--also possible at any time.

C. Communists may also renew operations against Quemoy islands to south.

D. Chinese Nationalists, aware that Communists are capable of taking any or all offshore islands against Nationalist opposition alone, may be considering evacuation of garrisons, beginning with Tachens.

II. ChiComm troops (reported at 3,000 by Chi Nat press), supported by air and sea, landed on Ichiang, held by 1,000 Chi Nat guerrillas, at 1435 (0135 Washington time) on 18 January. Ichiang apparently captured less than two hours later.

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A. Landings followed morning air attacks (at least 60 sorties) on Ichiang and Tachens by ChiCom fighters and bombers. After air strikes, Communist artillery on Toumen shelled Ichiang, started "intense fires" (according to MAAG), apparently softened garrison before attack.

B. Full extent of Tachen losses during heavy air raids on 18 and 19 January not yet known, but believed hard hit. Some [redacted] installations demolished on 18 January, others heavily damaged, but no American casualties. Chi Nats say 70 tons of relief supplies given Tachen garrison as Xmas gift from American relief societies were destroyed. Communist IL-10 attack bombers focused their 18 January attacks on Tachen radar, but whether radar destroyed not known. 25X1X4

C. MAAG adviser on Tachens (who observed attack) says landing force arrived in four LSM and 9 LCM plus "many junks and other vessels." Other reports conflict on numbers and types of ships. Invasion force apparently came from Toumen Island, five miles north of Ichiang, and was supported by several naval vessels, presumably gunboats and patrol craft. Two or three frigates (DE types) may also have been involved, according to unconfirmed MAAG reports.

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D. Landings made on north side and west coast of North Ichiang and on western side of South Ichiang at 1435 (Far East time), communications between Tachens and Ichiang garrison cut five minutes later. Peiping announced invasion begun at 1400, Ichiang "liberated" at 1600. Tachen command "wrote off" Ichiang at 1700.

E. Successful Ichiang invasion remarkable for speed of accomplishment. Ichiang coastal terrain is steep, cliffs rocky; operation must have been essentially scaling effort. MAAG says attack was "excellently co-ordinated and carried out."

F. With capture of Ichiang, ChiComs can mount artillery against Tachens, just 7-1/2 miles away. Using 100mm or 122mm guns, Comms could hit targets on both Tachens and in harbor between; with 105mm guns, could hit Upper Tachen and harbor.

III. Attack on Ichiang came almost without warning.

A. [redacted]

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B. On morning of 18th, MAAG reported air raids, noted clear weather, said Communist ships active in area. However, they saw "no indications of amphibious attack."

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C. Effectiveness of ChiCom planning and security applies to other Nationalist-held islands. Any or all could be similarly hit with little or no warning.

IV. Situation now ripe for Communist invasion of other islands in Tachen group.

A. Communist artillery has been shelling Pishan, 35 miles SW main Tachens, and MAAG has reported "many ChiCom ships" near Pishan. Held by 1,500 Nationalist guerrillas, Pishan could not withstand an attack similar to that made on Ichiang.

B. MAAG has also reported ChiCom boat concentrations near Yushan, 35 miles NE main Tachens, and has suggested Yushan may soon come under attack.

C. MAAG reported approximately 1,000 junks approaching Tachens from west on 19 January. Junks later said to be engaged in fishing operations, but fishing would provide good cover for an invasion force. Communist artillery on Chikushan, 9 miles SW main Tachens, reported by MAAG to have shelled Tachens on 19 January.

D. With heavy ChiCom air attacks continuing, with ChiCom naval forces operating unchallenged in area, and with more than enough ChiCom troops available to overwhelm Tachens, attack could come at any time.

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V. The Chi Nat defense ministry believes ChiComs will soon reintensify operations near Quemoys to divert Nationalist naval forces from Tachen area.

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[redacted]

VI. Nationalists are risking further losses of major naval vessels by sending to Tachens two destroyers and three destroyer-escorts.

A. This is brave last-resort measure to break up possible Communist invasion fleets, and might be of some help.

B. However, Communists have air superiority in area and Nationalist ships will be vulnerable to air action during daylight hours.

C. Ships might also be hit by Communist torpedo boats, which have twice sunk major Nat vessels.

VII. Situation of Nationalist garrison in Tachens bleak.

A. Adequate air support has not been provided, naval commander has refused obey orders, planned level of supplies not reached. Critical items are meats, cooking oils, some types of ammunition.

B. Communist shelling of Tachen harbor--which was resumed on 18 January--could make harbor unusable for further supply operations.

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C. Tachens commander reported "near despair" week ago, morale of entire garrison probably low after 18@19 January attacks.

D. Garrison might fail to resist if Communists make large-scale landing.

VIII Chiang Kai-shek may be considering, or may soon consider, withdrawal of Tachens garrison.

A. However, time for effective evacuation of garrison may have passed.

B. Unless US forces were to cover evacuation, Communists could make bloody fiasco of it.

IX. Loss of Tachens would be blow to morale on Formosa, even though islands have little military importance.

A. Taipei press reports of "invasion jitters" there after 18 January attack on Tachens.

B. Subsequently, expressions of disappointment and vexation at indications US 7th Fleet will not protect Tachens or other offshore islands.

C. Further Communist successes will increase Nationalist vulnerability to Communist propaganda inciting defection.

X. Loss of Tachens would also mean serious decline in Nationalist prestige, some decline in US prestige, among friendly governments in Far East and Overseas Chinese.

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A. Some of Asian "neutrals" which recognize Peiping would be glad to see, or indifferent about, Communist capture of Tachens.

B. However, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand, free states of Indochina, to lesser extent Japan, would all be concerned over Communist gains, might wonder how far they could count on US support in emergency.

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